

*Motions for Papers*

name was transferred for debate and this afternoon we shall have the opportunity to debate this issue for a few minutes. To begin with, I had a number of reasons for putting this notice of motion on the order paper, one of which was some comments made in this House on July 2 this year. Perhaps I could read these to get the matter in its proper context. At page 10751 of *Hansard* for July 2 a series of questions were directed to the Secretary of State for External Affairs (Mr. Sharp) by a number of members, including myself and, I think, the hon. member for Fundy-Royal (Mr. Fairweather) and the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Stanfield).

My question to the Secretary of State for External Affairs (Mr. Sharp) was as follows:

Mr. Speaker, I should like to ask the minister whether the Canadian government has as yet protested to the Nigerian government about the fact that the Red Cross has been expelled by the Nigerians from relief activities in the area.

The Secretary of State for External Affairs replied:

Yes, Mr. Speaker, as I said on Friday the Prime Minister sent a very special message to General Gowon following up previous contacts with that government.

On July 14 I put this motion on the Order Paper to try to get a copy of the message sent to General Gowon by the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau), but of course the House recessed and I did not get the answer. When the House reconvened in October, I resubmitted the notice for production of papers on November 4 and a reply came from the Parliamentary Secretary on November 19. I should like to read that reply as reported at page 999 of *Hansard*:

● (5:00 p.m.)

Mr. Speaker, communications between heads of government are normally confidential and their contents not made public. In any case, such action cannot be taken unilaterally. In the circumstances, I would ask the hon. member to withdraw his motion.

The motion has not been withdrawn and has been transferred for debate. I cannot properly outline my case in 20 minutes, and in any event I do not wish to take up the time of the House. The House and the government must be aware of our position on the question of Nigeria and Biafra. Surely, it is apparent that we are interested in having made public the communications between our Prime Minister and the head of the Nigerian government, notwithstanding the statement of the Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister (Mr. Walker) that communications of this

sort between heads of government are normally confidential and cannot be made public. Since the parliamentary secretary said that this information could not be given unilaterally, I hope he will tell us in his reply that he has consulted the Nigerian government and asked if it is willing to have this information made public. If that is so, I hope he will tell us when he asked, and if not, why not. The Canadian people have a right to know what was said by our Prime Minister to the Nigerian government about the Red Cross being expelled from that country. As I say, Canadians are very interested in this and have the right to know what our Prime Minister is saying. I suspect that what the government has said about difficulties being created by the war is just an excuse. It does not want to keep us informed and does not seem to want to alleviate the suffering in this tragic part of the world. We cannot excuse the government for its attitude, and we must put as much pressure as possible on the government. I shall, therefore, resume my seat in the hope of hearing a satisfactory explanation from the Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister.

**Mr. Yves Forest (Parliamentary Secretary to President of the Privy Council):** Mr. Speaker, on November 19 last the Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister (Mr. Walker) said that messages exchanged between heads of government were confidential and not made public. He also pointed out that such actions could not be taken unilaterally. I do not need to remind hon. members of the House of the intense interest the Canadian government has taken in the problems posed by the Nigerian civil conflict. The Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) described it in his statement last week.

As the Secretary of State for External Affairs (Mr. Sharp) informed the House on July 2, the message in question from the Prime Minister to General Gowon reminded the Nigerian head of state of the deep and continuing concern of the Canadian people for the innocent suffering as a result of the conflict. It also expressed the hope that means might be found which would permit the continuation of humanitarian relief efforts directed towards civilians in all parts of Nigeria.

The Canadian government has been able to speak frankly to the government of Nigeria on many aspects of the conflict and it is the government's intention to continue to do so. Our exchanges have taken many forms, one of which has been correspondence between